

Cattle Tours Are Interesting And Give Relief From Chores At Home

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MERTZON — Instead of wasting all of the week before last in pawing the earth and cursing fate for leading my early lambs to a market break that would have made Bonny Price Charles cry like a commoner, I chose to soften the misery by hobnobbing with the cowmen on the Angus Tour which passed through the eastern edge of the Shortgrass Country.

Once I arrived at the registration point, it didn't take long to figure out that cow touring will beat, hands-down any other activity of the cattle industry. A herder suffering the final throes of radiation blindness could see that shading under the pecan groves, partaking of the cool refreshments, and eating barbecued beef would surpass all the combined glories offered by the ranges where cattle roam. By that I mean that cow touring is so much better than cow punching (or cow owning) that one or the other should drop the word "cow" from its name.

In particular, these affairs are superior to running cows on the fading grassland of my own section of the country. But as far as that goes, there are plenty of moments out here when one realizes that being a milker on an African pit viper farm would be a saner vocation than trying to make a living from a cow herd on a scope of land that's frequently dry enough to make a desert terrapin wish he had a spot of talcum to run on his underside.

One feature of the tour that caught my eye was the parking arraignment of the automobiles surrounding the meeting spot. It was just the same as at any other Texas get-together, even though this one had cars from all over the nation. That is, all the known or suspected cockfighters and members of the society known as Dirt Track Horse Racers had stationed their cars away out on the outer edge, facing the exit. In contrast, the hombres who apparently had limited their interests to avocations less likely to come under the eye of such agencies as sheriff's offices and the Texas Rangers placed their automobiles bumper-to-bumper in every conceivable parking pattern that would prevent a fast getaway.

Of course, without asking the outlanders a bunch of personal questions, I couldn't ascertain if our own habits were nationally common. But the more I studied the group, and the more certain it became that the same parking order was going to be the rule at each stop on the tour, the more obvious it was that there must be some type of enforcement bureau that frowned upon their hobby.

The next thing I noticed about the characters that make up a national cow tour was how skeptical the non-residents are about the information they receive from the natives. It doesn't matter how factual you try to be, those hombres from out of the state are worse Doubting Thomases than the entire Internal Revenue Service put together.

For instance, a man could talk until he had a goiter the size of a ringbone encircling his voice box, and yet he couldn't convince a Midwesterner that the spring migration of rattlesnakes in certain portions of the Shortgrass County is populous enough to halt mail service to many of the principal outposts in the area.

And if you try to qualify the story by pointing out gaps in the rocky ledges which have been worn smooth by the hordes of rattlers pouring over the countryside, the outlanders scoff and act as if you're trying to pull off something funny.

One thing about trying to teach hardheaded Yankees about Texas: it sure makes a man sympathetic toward educators up north. No wonder this particular segment of the up-country population turned out to be cow persons instead of something fruitful like a doctor or government man. Why, Albert Einstein couldn't even have learned to count if he'd taken their attitude toward travel lectures.

Anyway, the cow tour was an excellent way to forget the tragedies of the lamb market. It was worthwhile to see the quality cattle and spend a little time with participants of the industry that wags calls the up-and-down set, or the T-Bone and Tallow crew. I am kind of sorry that I didn't delve a bit deeper into the past of the men who kept parking on the outskirts of the convoy; they might have had a good lead for a research study on modern methods of fast retreat.